

2021 -- S 1000

LC003105

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

A N A C T

RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS -- ADOPTION OF CHILDREN

Introduced By: Senator Maryellen Goodwin

Date Introduced: June 30, 2021

Referred To: Placed on Senate Calendar

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 15-7-7 of the General Laws in Chapter 15-7 entitled "Adoption of  
2 Children" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **15-7-7. Termination of parental rights.**

4 (a) The court shall, upon a petition duly filed by a governmental child placement agency  
5 or licensed child placement agency, or by the birthmother or guardian of a child born under  
6 circumstances referenced in subsection (a)(2)(viii) of this section, after notice to the parent and a  
7 hearing on the petition, terminate any and all legal rights of the parent to the child, including the  
8 right to notice of any subsequent adoption proceedings involving the child, if the court finds as a  
9 fact by clear and convincing evidence that:

10 (1) The parent has willfully neglected to provide proper care and maintenance for the child  
11 for a period of at least one year where financially able to do so. In determining whether the parent  
12 has willfully neglected to provide proper care and maintenance for the child, the court may  
13 disregard contributions to support which are of an infrequent and insubstantial nature; or

14 (2) The parent is unfit by reason of conduct or conditions seriously detrimental to the child;  
15 such as, but not limited to, the following:

16 (i) Institutionalization of the parent, including imprisonment, for a duration as to render it  
17 improbable for the parent to care for the child for an extended period of time;

18 (ii) Conduct toward any child of a cruel or abusive nature;

19 (iii) The child has been placed in the legal custody or care of the department for children,

1 youth, and families and the parent has a chronic substance abuse problem and the parent's prognosis  
2 indicates that the child will not be able to return to the custody of the parent within a reasonable  
3 period of time, considering the child's age and the need for a permanent home. The fact that a parent  
4 has been unable to provide care for a child for a period of twelve (12) months due to substance  
5 abuse shall constitute prima facie evidence of a chronic substance abuse problem;

6 (iv) The child has been placed with the department for children, youth, and families and  
7 the court has previously involuntarily terminated parental rights to another child of the parent and  
8 the parent continues to lack the ability or willingness to respond to services which would  
9 rehabilitate the parent and provided further that the court finds it is improbable that an additional  
10 period of services would result in reunification within a reasonable period of time considering the  
11 child's age and the need for a permanent home;

12 (v) The parent has subjected the child to aggravated circumstances, which circumstances  
13 shall be abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse;

14 (vi) The parent has committed murder or voluntary manslaughter on another of his or her  
15 children or has committed a felony assault resulting in serious bodily injury on that child or another  
16 of his or her children or has aided or abetted, attempted, conspired or solicited to commit such a  
17 murder or voluntary manslaughter; ~~or~~

18 (vii) The parent has exhibited behavior or conduct that is seriously detrimental to the child,  
19 for a duration as to render it improbable for the parent to care for the child for an extended period  
20 of time; or

21 (viii) The parent has been convicted of sexual assault upon the birthmother and parenthood  
22 is a result of that sexual assault, which shall be established by proving that the child was conceived  
23 as a result of a conviction for any offense set forth in §§ 11-37-2, 11-37-6 or 11-37-8.1. Conception  
24 as a result of sexual assault may be proved by DNA tests and upon conviction of the putative father,  
25 and after a fact finding hearing establishing paternity, said father's parental rights shall be  
26 terminated by order of the court. Termination of the parental rights of the father shall include the  
27 loss of all parental rights without limitation, including the adoption of said child. The father shall  
28 also have no right to any visitation with the minor child and shall have no right to any inheritance  
29 from a child conceived as a result of sexual assault as specified.

30 (3) The child has been placed in the legal custody or care of the department for children,  
31 youth, and families for at least twelve (12) months, and the parents were offered or received services  
32 to correct the situation which led to the child being placed; provided, that there is not a substantial  
33 probability that the child will be able to return safely to the parents' care within a reasonable period  
34 of time considering the child's age and the need for a permanent home; or

1 (4) The parent has abandoned or deserted the child. A lack of communication or contact  
2 with the child for at least a six (6) month period shall constitute prima facie evidence of  
3 abandonment or desertion. In the event that parents of an infant have had no contact or  
4 communication with the infant for a period of six (6) months the department shall file a petition  
5 pursuant to this section and the family court shall conduct expedited hearings on the petition.

6 (b)(1) In the event that the petition is filed pursuant to subdivisions (a)(1), (a)(2)(i),  
7 (a)(2)(iii), or (a)(2)(vii) of this section, the court shall find as a fact that, prior to the granting of the  
8 petition, such parental conduct or conditions must have occurred or existed notwithstanding the  
9 reasonable efforts which shall be made by the agency prior to the filing of the petition to encourage  
10 and strengthen the parental relationship so that the child can safely return to the family. In the event  
11 that a petition is filed pursuant to subdivisions (a)(2)(ii), (a)(2)(iv), (a)(2)(v), (a)(2)(vi) or (a)(4) of  
12 this section, the department has no obligation to engage in reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify  
13 a family.

14 (2) Any duty or obligation on the part of a licensed or governmental child placing agency  
15 to make reasonable efforts to strengthen the parental relationship shall cease upon the filing of a  
16 petition under this section. This provision shall not be construed and is not intended to limit or  
17 affect in any way the parents' right to see or visit with the child during the pendency of a petition  
18 under this section.

19 (3) Upon the filing of a termination of parental rights petition, the agency has an affirmative  
20 duty to identify, recruit, process and approve a qualified family for adoption or other permanent  
21 living arrangement for the child.

22 (c)(1) In considering the termination of rights as pursuant to subsection (a), the court shall  
23 give primary consideration to the physical, psychological, mental, and intellectual needs of the  
24 child insofar as that consideration is not inconsistent with other provisions of this chapter.

25 (2) The consideration shall include the following: If a child has been placed in foster family  
26 care, voluntarily or involuntarily, the court shall determine whether the child has been integrated  
27 into the foster family to the extent that the child's familial identity is with the foster family and  
28 whether the foster family is able and willing to permanently integrate the child into the foster  
29 family; provided, that in considering integrating into a foster family, the court should consider:

30 (i) The length of time child has lived in a stable, satisfactory environment and the  
31 desirability of maintaining that environment and continuity for the child; and

32 (ii) The reasonable preference of the child, if the court determines that the child has  
33 sufficient capacity to express a reasonable preference.

34 (d) If the court finds that the parental rights of the parent should be terminated as specified

1 in subsection (a), it shall by decree duly entered, appoint some suitable person to give or withhold  
2 consent in any subsequent adoption proceedings. In the case of petitions filed by licensed or  
3 governmental child placement agencies, the court shall appoint the agency to be the sole party to  
4 give or withhold consent to the adoption of the child and further vest the agency with all rights of  
5 guardianship over the child.

6 (e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the introduction of expert  
7 testimony with respect to any illness, medical or psychological condition, trauma, incompetency,  
8 addiction to drugs, or alcoholism of any parent who has exhibited behavior or conduct that is  
9 seriously detrimental to a child, to assist the court in evaluating the reason for the conduct or its  
10 probable duration.

11 (f) The record of the testimony of the parties adduced in any proceeding terminating  
12 parental rights to a child shall be entitled to the confidentiality provided for in § 8-10-21 and more  
13 specifically shall not be admissible in any civil, criminal, or other proceeding in any court against  
14 a person named a defendant or respondent for any purpose, except in subsequent proceedings  
15 involving the same child or proceedings involving the same respondent.

16 (g) In the event any child, the parental rights to whom have been finally terminated, has  
17 not been placed by the agency in the home of a person or persons with the intention of adopting the  
18 child within thirty (30) days from the date of the final termination decree, the family court shall  
19 review the status of the child and the agency shall file a report that documents the steps the agency  
20 is taking to find an adoptive family or other permanent living arrangement for the child, to place  
21 the child with an adoptive family, a fit and willing relative, a legal guardian, or in another planned  
22 permanent living arrangement, and to finalize the adoption or legal guardianship. At a minimum,  
23 this documentation shall include child specific recruitment efforts, such as the use of state, regional  
24 and national adoption exchanges, including electronic exchange system.

25 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T  
RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS -- ADOPTION OF CHILDREN

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1           This act would terminate all parental rights of any person convicted of sexual assault which  
2 results in the birth of a child from said assault. Termination of parental rights would take effect  
3 after a fact finding hearing in the family court which established the conviction of the accused  
4 father and after establishing paternity through the use of DNA.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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